

January 18, 2022

Dear Chairman Hill:

I am writing to you to express my strong opposition to Maret's proposed development in its current form.

You don't have to be an environmental engineer to understand that cutting down 40 mature trees, digging up a natural grass field currently home to a wide variety of flora and fauna, flattening a five acre parcel with a 35' change in grade, and covering pretty much the entire thing in either plastic grass or paving is a bad idea. What direction are we going in? Maret claims to teach environmental stewardship. Is this what they mean?

This heavy handed, tone deaf development is not what we want or need in our city. While artificial turf remains popular in environments where growing natural grass is challenging, this is certainly not an issue in DC. Artificial turf has long been suspected of creating more frequent and more serious injuries. The New York Times quotes a study reporting, "student athletes in several sports were, on average, 58% more likely to sustain an injury during athletic activity on artificial turf than on natural grass." In 2020, the NFL Players Association called for the NFL to switch from synthetic to natural turf on all its playing and practice fields, in order to reduce injuries.

Increasingly, research shows the cost to the environment of artificial turf is substantial and multi-faceted. Although newer artificial turf products have replaced the crumb rubber infill with organic materials, the plastic grass blades themselves also degrade over time, through friction and exposure to the environment. Studies in Europe indicate alarming quantities of microplastics are released into soil and waterways by aging artificial turf fields.

The average life span of artificial turf is only 10 years, and in fact, Maret admits it will be replacing the turf every 8-10 years. That means over the course of the 50 year lease signed by Maret, 25 acres of artificial turf will be delivered to the DC landfill. The manufacturers claim that, technically, the turf "is recyclable." The conclusion of an investigation by The Atlantic, however, is that, "Separating the constituent parts to recycle this polymer sandwich is nearly impossible and almost never done." Instead, it will be dumped into area landfills where it will quietly continue to leach microplastics into the environment for generations.

Our local elementary school, Lafayette, was remodeled in the 1970's, during the brief moment of popularity of "open plan" classrooms. My 3 children all attended Lafayette, and they and their friends suffered the chaos of no walls: the noise and confusion that made concentration difficult and drove teachers to spend their own money to build barriers to enclose their classrooms. In the latest beautiful remodeling, the walls were restored, with wonderful results.

Let's be smarter this time. Let's not decimate a complex, thriving natural ecosystem, which will be difficult if not impossible to rebuild, once destroyed. Let's be ahead of the curve, not behind it. The news is flooded with more and more evidence of the environmental degradation our short-sighted choices have caused. Let's not create our own heat island in the middle of a climate crisis.

This is not about children playing. I love children, gave up the career I loved to get involved in my children's schools, volunteering to help not just my own children, but my larger community. It's not about the importance of physical activity. Playing sports does not require artificial turf, or travel clubs. This is about exercising our judgement to develop our city in thoughtful, responsible ways that protect our environment, and our communities, and safeguard both for future generations.

Maret has a lot of money. Maret has a lot of friends with a great deal of influence.

We have you. And you have us! Please let me know how I can support you in your work to protect our neighborhood, and I look forward to working together to provide sound stewardship for our city.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane Tillinghast Sherman".

Jane Tillinghast Sherman  
5829 Nebraska Ave. NW